

DYSTHYMIA

(Low-Grade Depression)



BASIC INFORMATION

A chronic depressive mood with symptoms that are milder, but longer lasting, than those of a major depressive episode. The onset of dysthymia is often unnoticed, and many people are not aware of the change in their lives. Symptoms may begin in childhood or in adolescence and continue over years or decades.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Dysthymia may be diagnosed if several of the following signs and symptoms have been present for most of the day, for most days, for two years or more (one year for children or teens), with no more than two months symptom-free:

- Poor appetite or eating too much.
- Sleep problems (too much or too little sleep).
- Lack of energy; feeling tired all the time.
- Preoccupation with failure, inadequacy, and negative thoughts (hopelessness).
- Feelings of self-pity; pessimistic attitude.
- Lack of productivity at home and work.
- Trouble with concentration and making decisions.
- Lack of interest or enjoyment in pleasurable or social activities.
- Irritability.
- Crying for no reason.
- Overcritical or complaining.
- Skeptical.

CAUSES

Probably due to a combination of genetic factors, developmental factors and psychosocial factors (job loss, divorce).

RISK INCREASES WITH

Family history of depressive illnesses.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

No specific preventive measures known. Anticipate and prepare for major life changes where possible.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

The majority of people are helped with treatment. It may take several months before symptoms show improvement. Sometimes it's not until one has been treated and is feeling better that one realizes how depressed he or she has been.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Chronic recurrence; major depression.
- Alcohol abuse or dependency.

Complications will depend on underlying disorder.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Medical history and physical exam by a doctor.
- Psychotherapy or counseling along with drug treatment achieves the best results. Several techniques are effective in treating dysthymia, such as cognitive or behavior therapy (focuses on changing negative thought patterns into positive ones), interpersonal therapy (focuses on building better relationships) and cultural analysis (deals with the role of society in contributing to low self-esteem and powerless feelings).
- Vocational counseling for some patients to be sure their work suits their temperament.
- Join a support group. They help many people with sharing problems and fostering friendships.
- Avoid alcohol. If you need help stopping, ask your doctor, or contact an Alcoholics Anonymous group in your community.
- Reduce emotional stress in your life. Learn techniques to cope with stress.
- Additional information is available from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 9000 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20892, (800) 232-3472.

MEDICATIONS

Your doctor may prescribe antidepressants. The medication may be needed for several months or several years. If one medication doesn't work, it is possible that another will.

ACTIVITY

No restrictions. A routine physical exercise program is recommended.

DIET

Eat a normal well-balanced diet to maintain optimum health.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of dysthymia.
- Symptoms worsen or don't improve despite treatment.